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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003813

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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, S/CT, INR (VINCENT)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: SECURITY FORCES MOVING FORWARD,
AS SECTARIAN TENSIONS SIMMER

REF: A. BANGKOK 03378 (NEW STATISTICS MORE AMBUSHES)
[1B.](#) BANGKOK 01675 (PARAMILITARY AND NON-TRADITIONAL
FORCES)
[1C.](#) BANGKOK 01572 (SECTARIAN PASSIONS RISING)

Classified By: Political Counselor Susan M. Sutton. Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[11.](#) (C) Summary. A series of raids and arrests in Thailand's troubled South may signify better local cooperation, improved intelligence and a more aggressive posture by security officials. While these arrests may have been too broad, several "big fish" in the local separatist movement appear to be among those detained. One non-government contact also says that insurgent operations were disrupted by these arrests. At the same time, however, local contacts tell us that relations between the Malay-Muslim and Thai-Buddhist communities continue to spiral downward, inspiring a series of small retaliatory attacks in some areas. End Summary.

MORE RAIDS, BETTER ARRESTS?

[12.](#) (C) In a major shift from their historically defensive posture, Thai security officials conducted at least half-a-dozen high-profile raids in the provinces of Yala and Narathiwat in early July, resulting in the arrest of nearly 300 suspected insurgents. The raids, which included both small units and larger (up to 200 security officers) joint police-Army task forces, also netted a significant number of explosive devices. Of note, all of these operations were reportedly the result of tip-offs by local villagers, suggesting a marked improvement in grassroots cooperation with the security forces. These raids included:

--July 1. A joint police-Army task force arrests 50 suspects in the Cho Airong district of Narathiwat. Among those arrested is Muhammad Jaemae, an alleged insurgent trainer who previously had a bounty on his head.

--July 2. Army teams in Yala's Banang Sata district and Narathiwat's Sungai Padi district arrest nearly 196 suspects, including a reported 40 "important" insurgent figures.

--July 2. Acting on a local tip-off of an explosion and blood trail in a pineapple field, police and military officials in the Muang district of Narathiwat follow the trail to the Islam Burapa School, where they arrest 11

suspected insurgents.

--July 5. Again, a local tip-off leads officials to a cache of explosives and IEDs in the Muang district of Yala. Separate intelligence leads authorities to a house serving as a bomb-lab, where three suspects are arrested.

--July 8. A local informant reports that suspected insurgents are hiding in a village in the Ruso district of Narathiwat, prompting a five-hour Army search of the area that results in 8 arrests.

¶3. (C) Human Rights Watch's Sunai Phasuk (protect), who recently returned to Bangkok from one of his frequent trips in the South, emphasized to us that his group is watching the fate of the those arrested carefully--most of whom are being held in Army custody (Note: Septel will detail his and other groups' findings on detainees. End Note). While the raids were "too sweeping" in Sunai's view, security officials did manage to capture several "big fish" from the local insurgent cells. Sunai also confirmed that these arrests had disrupted specific insurgent operations, pointing to the lack of coordinated or major attacks in the last week. Officials were trying to "squeeze" the insurgent hotbeds of Banang Sata and Sungai Padi with these operations. According to Sunai, officials found a new type of IED initiator fashioned out of a garage door opener during a raid on a bomb lab.

¶4. (C) The Nation newspaper reporter Don Pathan--who likewise travels to the South regularly--echoed some of Sunai's comments, saying that the arrests were too broad, but included several important insurgent fighters and were based on improved cooperation from locals providing information.

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He highlighted the raid on and subsequent closure of the Islam Burapa school, which has long been rumored as a source of support for the insurgency.

BUT SECTARIAN TENSIONS SIMMERING

¶5. (C) Relations between Thai-Buddhist and Malay-Muslim communities continue to deteriorate (ref C), and local pressure by Buddhists on the government to "act tougher" appears to be growing. Two Buddhist interlocutors in Hat Yai told us that relations between the two communities were terrible: "we hate each other now." Several contacts emphasized efforts by Buddhist communities to arm themselves. Sunai said that low-level retaliatory attacks in some areas are occurring with increasing frequency. The killing of an Imam in Yala in late June was actually a retaliatory act by local Buddhists: the Imam's son is a key figure in the insurgency who is on the run, so the locals killed his father. Buddhists in some parts of Songkhla province have instituted a special, unofficial curfew that precludes Malay-Muslims from leaving their houses after 6 pm.

SOME RANGERS BETTER THAN EXPECTED

¶6. (C) On the topic of the irregular "Ranger" forces used to boost security manpower in the South (ref B), Sunai said that his latest trip had given him a less pessimistic view of them. While allegations of heavy-handed tactics (and even some reports of attacks on Malay-Muslims) continue to circulate, Sunai said that he also heard of some Ranger units which are working well with local communities and improving security in their area. Indeed, local press highlighted a protest earlier this month in the Muang district of Yala, where local villagers actually protested against the planned removal of a local Ranger unit (in two or three previous cases in other areas, locals agitated for the removal of the Rangers). Security officials have also announced the expansion of local village defense volunteer units, which Sunai characterized as "ok." According to him, Army training

and administration of both the Rangers and defense volunteers (which are under the command of Ministry of Interior officials) is relatively neutral and balanced. Sunai warned, however, that training conducted by the Border Patrol Police is just the opposite: rife with the message that, for Buddhists, "it's time to get even."

COMMENT

¶7. (C) As laudable as the Surayud government's reconciliation policy has been, the missing element has been an improvement in the basic security situation in the South. Security officials have lamented the poor quality of cooperation by local villagers and a dearth of actionable intelligence. Just as important, local security efforts appeared hamstrung by overly cautious leadership. This may be changing for the better. However, these new improvements in security operations are unlikely to have an immediate impact on rising tensions between the two ethnic communities in the South, which remain cause for serious concern.

BOYCE